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INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

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It is characteristic of our age to approach all such subjects as the doctrine of the divinity of Christ in the historical way. We do not assume that the origin of a belief settles the question of its truth and value, but we feel sure that a correct knowledge of its origin is an essential help in determining its truth and value and interpreting its meaning. In this essay an attempt is made to suggest in a summary way some of the problems of the historian with reference to the beginnings of this faith, and some inferences that may be drawn from the history as to our own standpoint.

I. The first question that we naturally ask is: What did Jesus think and say about himself? The return from dogma to history, which characterizes our age, finds its chief task and its special justification in the return from the Christ of dogma to the Jesus of history. We begin, then, with the gospels in our inquiry, but we shall not end there; and in the gospels we begin with the question of the Messiah, but here also we cannot end where we begin. It is quite natural that in this return to history, which is our inevitable impulse and our conscious pride, we should push back of the apostolic age itself and strive to get into the immediate presence of the Master; and that we should at first include Paul and John in our judgment of doubt or disfavor upon all theological dogmas about the person and work of Christ as departures from the simplicity of the truth and the reality of the life as they were in him. But what has thus far been the result of this eager effort of many minds by all means to get back to the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth? It has not been altogether reassuring. We are here concerned with these results as they bear on the self-consciousness of Jesus, that is, primarily, on the question of his messiahship. Messiahship is not divinity, and yet, if a basis is to be found in the teaching

of Jesus for the later faith in his divine nature, this is the point which it is natural to examine first. But what most impresses and disturbs us at this point is to find how little agreement has been reached, and how opinions seem now to be multiplying and moving farther than ever apart.

A fact which explains in part the various opinions that find support on this matter is that the gospels present two different aspects of the teachings of Jesus which cannot easily be harmonized. According to one, his chief message was the fatherhood of God and the sonship of man; the love of God to man, and the love of man to God and to man; the religious faith and ethical ideal which he set forth, both positively in plain words and in parables, and negatively in criticism and condemnation of the conceptions of God and of the law which the Pharisees taught in words and life. According to the other aspect, his message was the speedy coming of the kingdom of God, that is, of God as King and Judge, and his own calling to the supreme place of glory and power in God's kingdom, which he would share with his faithful followers. According to the first aspect, Jesus appears as a teacher of spiritual insight and moral authority, concerned with the present, revealing the wrong ideals and practices of his time, and pointing out the one way of true life toward God and man. He is the calm, sane seer, who dwells on the heights, who speaks for all times that which is eternally true. According to the second aspect, Jesus appears as the prophet of a threatening catastrophe. He is absorbed in his urgent message that God's coming is at hand. He is a man of vision and ecstasy, who speaks under stress of deep emotion and with a fiery inspiration. His gospel is an eschatology, an announcement of last things, and his words are meant, not for all times, but for last times. To some, as to Wellhausen, Jesus appears almost wholly in the former light; to others, as to the younger Weiss, almost wholly in the latter. The two conceptions seem quite irreconcilable, and it is perplexing to find them maintained by competent historians, and to find that a case can be made out for each on the basis of the synoptic gospels, and that the approach toward agreement as to the synoptic problem

does not appear to bring with it an answer even to a question of such radical significance as this.

As a result in part of such differences in the total impression of the teaching of Jesus, and in part of different judgments as to the course of tradition that lies behind our gospels and their sources, various views are put forth as to the thought of Jesus about messiahship, and many questions are now open in the court of critical investigation. Was Jesus conscious of the Messiah-calling in childhood, or, as most affirm, at baptism, because of the vision and the divine voice, or at some later point in his ministry, because of his inner sense of a unique sonship, or because of the necessity he found himself under of criticising not only Pharisaism but Mosaism, and because no prophet, no one less than Messiah, could be authorized to put a new law in place of the old? Did Peter's confession call forth this certainty in him, or the people's acclamations as he entered Jerusalem, or the high-priest's solemn question? Or was the Messiah-idea absent from the whole ministry of Jesus, being the earliest form of apostolic faith in the risen Lord? Did the voice of baptism, if this was the messianic call, relate to the servant in Isaiah, chap. 42, in whom God was well pleased, or to the king in Psalm 2, whom God had that day begotten? The two ideals are far apart, and tradition wavers as to the original form. Did Jesus choose messiahship as the form of his ministry gladly and confidently, or under a compulsion due to the conditions and expectations of his time, so that a tragic element entered into his choice, as into its outcome? Does messiahship belong in the region of the sober, rational life, or in that of vision and ecstasy? Did Jesus conceive of his messiahship after the ruling type of a national king, either in a literal or in a spiritual sense; or after that very different type which we meet in the Book of Enoch, developed out of Daniel's figure of the one like a son of man—a type transcendent and heavenly in character, cosmic rather than national in range? Could Jesus have used the phrase "Son of man" as a messianic title? Was the messianic consciousness of Jesus the consciousness of being already the Messiah, so that he must have spiritualized that conception and given it the character of a divinely sent teacher,

physician, deliverer; or was it the consciousness of being the one chosen by God and destined for messiahship in the coming kingdom, so that he may have accepted it in a more literal sense? What is the meaning of the idea expressed in Acts and by Paul that Jesus became Messiah through his death and resurrection? Does it mean that the disciples did not know him as such till then, that the messiahship was really a product of the resurrection faith, or that Jesus himself only looked forward to a future messiahship, or that the disciples, through Jewish prejudices, had missed the spiritual sense of his earthly messiahship?

I do not mean to imply that all these questions are equally open, and all the alternatives equally probable. But every view thus suggested has its advocate among historians of good capacity and standing, and at some points the tendency now is toward the answer that we should not choose. I do not mean that historical resources are exhausted and that the place of messiahship in the mind of Jesus can never be determined with greater certainty and a larger agreement than are now attained. Yet it must be evident that religious needs cannot wait for the settling of such complex historical problems and must not be supposed to be dependent on them; and also that the historian himself must look elsewhere for that basis of relative certainty that he requires.

Evidently the study of the Messiah-consciousness of Jesus does not promise to lead us far toward an understanding of his inmost self. The study rather tends to turn us from itself to the things more clearly said and more unquestionably authentic in order to solve the problem of his witness to himself. We begin with the Messiah-consciousness, but we do not come to an end there. We begin to suspect that Jesus did not say so much about himself as we had supposed. And then we see that it was not in what he said about himself, but in what he said about God and about man, in his life with God and in his love for man, that he himself is most fully revealed. The study of his self-consciousness involves us in the most complicated and confusing problems. The study of his consciousness of God, his view of God's nature and demands, and of man's duty and

destiny, brings us into a region of light, and makes us aware of the heavenly glory of him from whom the light comes. He does not seem to be conscious of himself. His consciousness is wholly absorbed in God and in his fellow-man; and it would almost seem as if the study of his self-consciousness necessarily put us at an unfortunate point of view and made it impossible for us to see him as he was. It is when we listen to his words about God and man that we realize that the truth he is uttering is the truth of God; that his words are the words of God; that he is speaking in entire unconsciousness, in forgetfulness of self, with an authority that does not belong to man. We know that the sonship to which he calls us belongs primarily and perfectly to him, that the divine love which he declares as a gospel and commands as a law is present in life and truth in him. He taught of God, did God's work, and thus brought God's salvation near by word and deed. What men must think of God he made known, and what character and life that thought demands; but he seems to have left it to them to decide what they would think of him.

Some things, however, do result from the study of his self-testimony, which are of the nature of warning and direction as to our thought of the divinity of Christ. One thing is that we are to look nowhere but to the mind of the man Jesus if we would understand the distinctive nature and moral quality of the divine spirit that was in him. His character is the primary and essential factor in the interpretation of his divinity.

Again, his teaching should warn us against conceiving of his divinity in such a way as to exclude the imitation of him. This would be to repeat toward Jesus the error in the attitude of the Jewish mind toward God which he was most concerned to correct. He created or restored the ideal of God-likeness, setting before men as the supreme duty and the highest joy the imitation of the Father, teaching that reverent worship does not exclude imitation, but that these two belong together, obedience and aspiration, the child-like trust and the Father-like love. He must therefore necessarily, and did actually, repel any worship of himself that made the imitation of his mind and ways unessential or impossible, any conception of his sonship that

made more difficult instead of more natural the belief in the divine sonship of men.

Again, it could not be the will of Jesus that we should think of his divinity in a way that denies the Fatherhood of God, but only in a way that confirms it. It has been said that a high Christology has often produced or accompanied a weak sense of God. Men have thought of God as remote and inaccessible, and of Christ as near. They have thought of God as austere, unfavorable, coldly just, and of Christ as loving and forgiving. But Jesus taught the nearness of God, and that it is he, not some other, who clothes the lily and feeds the birds of the air. He taught the love of God, that he is good to evil and good alike, that his patient, suffering love draws sinners back to him, and that his chief joy is in their return. Whatever love Jesus felt toward men and whatever ministry he performed was in imitation of God and was justified by an appeal to the nature and example of God. It was surely far from his thought that he was to stand between men and God, spanning the distance that severed them and overcoming the disposition in God that kept them estranged. Therefore his divinity could not mean that he is a second God, doing what God cannot or will not do for men. Such a conception would be utterly abhorrent in his eyes. His divinity must lie in his oneness with God, not in his separateness, and come to effect in our oneness with God through him. Paul should have made the error I refer to impossible. In his view Christ brought men near to God by revealing God and executing his will of love to men. Christ was not in the world reconciling God to men, but God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Christ does not commend his love to us over against the justice and displeasure of God, but God commends his own love to us in that when we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

II. This brings us to a second main question: What did his first disciples come to think of him? We cannot avoid this question or make it secondary, if we would come through history to some understanding of what the divinity of Christ should mean. We begin with the gospels, and our study of them is not without result. But we must carry our question also over into

the documents of the apostolic age. What meets us here? We find ourselves in the atmosphere of the worship of Jesus. The religion of the Father has become the religion of the Son. The New Testament writers give us various forms of expression of the common faith in the divinity of Christ, various theories that state and interpret the common worship of him, in other words, various Christologies.

Two things impress us in this wonderful, new, religious creation which the New Testament records. One is the boldness with which every important religious conception is applied to Christ and interpreted by him; and the other is that this devotion to Christ does not mean at all an anxious dwelling upon the earthly life of Jesus, but is almost wholly directed upward and forward to the living Christ and the coming one. Let us look somewhat more closely at these two wonders of New Testament Christology.

1. Religion has to do with overcoming the separation which men know exists between themselves and God, and as this separation is conceived in different ways, so the means by which it is to be overcome are variously imagined. There were at the time of the beginning of Christianity many sorts of mediating agents or processes by which this one religious task was to be performed, by which God and man were brought into harmony and oneness. Now, according to Christian experience, Christ is the one who unites God and man, who removes the estrangement, who breaks down the barrier, in whom God approaches man, and in whom man draws near to God. Hence Christian faith put Christ above all other agents and ascribed to him the names or the functions of those mediating, revealing, redeeming powers or persons in which religious faith had formerly trusted.

The Messiah was the deliverer for whom the Jewish people had hoped; hence the first confession of Christian faith was, Jesus is Messiah; and whatever heightening of the figure of Messiah had been attempted by Judaism, of its own impulse or under foreign influence, whatever identification of him with the heavenly, typical man and the coming judge of men and angels, all this Christians would eagerly appropriate to Jesus, knowing that no office was too high for him.

Angels had been mediators between God and man, and especially for Israel the angel Michael had been a heavenly helper, an intercessor before God on Israel's behalf, a minister to Israel of God's saving gifts. Now, Christ is above all angels, and to him are assigned the loftiest angelic qualities of nature and function. The help of no other angelic being is needed, and the malice of none is to be feared.

The Spirit of God had been the medium of the divine activity in men, the imparters of divine energies, the purifier of man's nature. Now, even the divine Spirit is conceived of as the Spirit of Christ. This is probably the most significant feature in Paul's Christology—this, rather than the idea of pre-existence. The exalted Christ is the life-giving Spirit that dwells in man and makes him a new creature. The Christian life is due to the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ. It is a life in Christ, the life of Christ in us. The Lord is the Spirit, and our transformation into the image of Christ is from the Lord, the Spirit.

In the Old Testament, Jehovah is the God of Israel's salvation. From Egypt onward he is Israel's God, the God of the nation's trust and hope. As Jehovah, God drew near to Israel, and Israel had access to God. Christian faith rose even to this height and identified Christ with the revealing and redeeming God of Israel. The Greek rendering of Jehovah was "Lord," and in declaring Jesus to be Lord, Paul quite certainly means that he is now to Christian faith what Jehovah was to Israel's faith, God as self-revealing, self-communicating, the God who is near and who comes to save. Christ was not Lord from the beginning, but he was, Paul tells us, exalted to that place and given that name that is above every name because of his self-denial, because in his former state in the likeness of God he had not done what, according to current belief, certain other angel beings had done—sought to seize upon the throne of God—but had rather become a servant and been obedient unto death. The lordship of Christ was the result of his earthly life and death freely undertaken for men's salvation. Now, he is the Christian's Lord-Jehovah, and is destined to be worshiped by the whole creation of God. No wonder that the decisive Christian confes-

sion as Paul formulates it is no longer, "Jesus is Messiah," but "Jesus is Lord." No wonder that it seemed to him that no one could make that confession except by the Spirit of God.

But this does not end the process by which all that men valued in their past religious faith was confidently ascribed to Christ and given his name and character. The conception of the Wisdom of God had done noble service in expressing the self-communicating relation of God to the world and to man. By wisdom God made the world. She was his first creation and his helper as he laid the foundations of the earth. By his wisdom God had entered from age to age into holy souls, and made men friends of God and prophets. Now, to Christian faith Christ is the divine wisdom, the agent of God in creation, and the inspirer of a knowledge of God and of divine mysteries in the minds of men. The fulness of the divine wisdom was in him and is by him imparted.

Somewhat related to this was the Logos conception, whose birth and growth was on Greek, not on Hebrew, soil. The *reason* of God, which is the soul of the world, and the *word* of God, which is the creative power by which all is made and all made known—this supreme mediating conception of the Hellenists was also interpreted by Christian faith as one more name and aspect of Christ. Here, as in every case, the identification meant a change. Christian faith did not simply claim all for Christ, but it knew how to assimilate all to Christ. So that while in this marvelous process the figure of Jesus, the Messiah, was lifted up into the heavens and transfigured, on the other hand, all these thoughts and images of men's religious strivings and ideals were in good measure themselves elevated and spiritualized by the all-subduing might of the Spirit of Christ. The Logos of John's gospel and even of the Apologists is very different from the Logos of Philo, and how much greater than his!

With the conception of the Law, finally, Christ was put chiefly in contrast. Yet even here the element of fulfilment was by no means wanting.

This is one characteristic of the process of thought about Jesus that meets us in the New Testament—the boldness with

which the important religious conceptions of the past were identified with Christ and interpreted by him and he by them.

2. The second characteristic fact is that all this was done without anxious and literal dependence on the Jesus of history. The interest of the apostolic age in Christ was supreme. Its interest in the historical Jesus, his deeds and words, was slight. It was not Jesus to whom all these divine names were ascribed; it was the risen and ascended Christ. His followers did not look backward to find and keep him, and linger among memories of the past. They looked upward, and they looked within. The living Christ was over them, their Lord; the Spirit of Christ was in them, the inspiring power of their new life. We may well wonder at this, and we might easily regret at first that they had not more anxiety to collect and preserve their memories of Jesus and give to the future a far fuller and more exact picture of him just as he was. But we well know, when we stop to think, that we are here in the presence of the very secret of the Christian religion, the very heart of its powerful life. What these men, and even Paul himself, had, they received ultimately from the Jesus of history. In his soul lies hidden the divine mystery of our faith. But having searched gropingly and without sure result through the gospel traditions for that mystery we may well find—and rejoice in this—that we are nearer grasping it in the letters of Paul. The greatness of Jesus, his secret, his divinity, let us say, is most nearly disclosed in the power that he had to produce in men a living faith that was not bound to his earthly presence, that was not contained in the words he uttered and the life he lived, though it had its first expression there, that did not depend on accurate recollections of all that he had said. It did, indeed, produce—this power of life that went forth from him—a supreme devotion and lasting loyalty to him. He himself, and no other, was, as we have seen, the sufficient, all-inclusive, all-interpreting and all-fulfilling revelation, communication, redemption from God. He was the one way to God, and yet his way was to set men upon their own way and divinely further them in it. The freedom of the apostolic age is the wonder of it, its worship of Christ and its freedom from bondage even to him.

He was apprehended as one who ruled and yet who set free. The law of his rule was a law of liberty. He was the Lord, but he was also the Spirit. He set men free. That was his way; that was their experience. He set them free even from himself as a literal example, as a binding law. Perhaps if he had written a book, he could not have liberated men from subjection to its letter. His religion might then have been a new legalism, and men might not have dared to move forward, to do new things and greater than his, to think new thoughts as the Spirit led them into the truth. Perhaps if the gospels were more perfect as historical sources and we could now accomplish our desire and perfectly recover the Jesus of history, we might lose the essence of Christianity as a living, ever-moving, free Spirit. So it may be that such disappointment as history has for us in our effort to get back to Jesus is for our good. If we could literally get back to him, could we also spiritually move forward in him? Certainly we could do so only in some such way as the first Christians did, by some measure of disregard for what was past, by the possession of the Spirit of Christ as an indwelling, divine power.

How, then, ought we to judge the Christology of the first age, two of the impressive characteristics of which we have had in view? Must we not say that it is the spirit, not the letter, of it that demands our assent? In the region of letter and form there is much that we cannot make our own. The Messiah is not to us, as he was to the Jews, a figure that expresses our living hope and stirs our deepest feeling. Hence the confession that Jesus is Messiah cannot be for us the best expression of the faith that in Jesus our hope of salvation is, or is destined to be, realized. Angels play no significant rôle in our view of history or of nature. The declaration that Jesus is above all the angel host, and that the interceding and mediating ministry of angels is fully performed by him, does not adequately express our highest thought of his office. The Logos is not our ruling philosophical term. We do not find the best explanation of the universe and of God's relation to it in this doctrine. Hence the identification of Christ with the Logos is not to us what it would have been to Philo—the incarnation in this person of our highest

truth, the domination of our world by his spirit. But it is not only the specific forms of these first Christologies that we can not adopt with literalness and put upon our minds as fetters. We must recognize also a certain danger in all this movement, splendid and for good as it was as a whole. It has been truly said that the Logos Christology is not higher but lower than the simple Christology of common Christianity which it rivaled and displaced; for, according to this, men are to see in Jesus, not God himself, but a second divine essence, God himself being remote and inaccessible. To see God in Christ, and to come to God through Christ, and to receive with faith in Christ, the inworking of the divine Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Father—this expresses in terms of experience a higher than the Logos Christology, a higher conception of the divinity of Christ than can be set in formulas.

No, it is not the letter, but the spirit, of the performance of the apostolic age that we should imitate. And what was its spirit? It was the offering of their best thought to Christ. It was the subjection of their entire being to him. It was a victorious conquest of self and sin in his name. If we can do something like this; if we can in some real way make Christ central in our world and in our life as they did in theirs; if we can conquer the present world of knowledge and effort in the name of Christ and by his Spirit, as they conquered their world; then we shall be doing what they did. But if we can only repeat their formulas and bind ourselves to dogmas put together out of their phrases, we shall be doing what they did not; we shall fall short of their greatness, because we miss the liberty with which Christ had set them free.

III. The final question is thus reached, how we can most surely and easily gain for ourselves this living and liberating Spirit of Christ, and especially whether we can gain it best from the Jesus of history or from the Christ of apostolic faith, from the synoptic gospels or from Paul and John. Let us agree that it is Christ the Spirit that we are seeking to grasp; that the question of the divinity of Christ, if it is to have any reality for us, must become a question of experience, not of theory; that it is only

the experience of Christ as divine that gives us the right to affirm his divinity. Which of the two ways, then, will most directly and certainly lead us to the experience of Christ as a living, divine power, the divine Spirit within us? From the earliest times to the latest this question has been differently answered by different men, so that we may fairly infer that some, in fact, find one way easier and some the other. This difference now divides the ranks of liberal theologians, and the question is one of vital concern, how deep-going a difference it is, and whether we must make a definite choice for ourselves.

In the New Testament itself we find evidence of differences of judgment as to the place and significance of the earthly life of Jesus in relation to the vision and possession of God in him and through him. There are here in particular two great types of Christian faith, Paul's and John's, which differ at this point. Paul's: Jesus through his death and resurrection has become Lord over us and life-giving Spirit in us, as present experience testifies; John's: the divine Logos became flesh in Jesus, whose life was a complete disclosure of God, as past experience proves. One finds divinity in the effects produced in men by the Spirit of Christ after his death; the other finds divinity in the earthly life of Jesus spiritually discerned. The two types are not necessarily contradictory, though they may become so. In fact, to Paul and John alike the gospel on the one side is bound up indissolubly with a historical person, and on the other side has received from him and receives with him a living principle of growth and free development. Furthermore, we can see the special value of the point of view of each in his place. Paul contributed mightily to the accomplishment of that first essential transition from following an earthly master to believing in a heavenly one and living in him. The thing first needed was the disengagement of Christian faith from what was past and sensible, the translation of it into the region of the eternal. Paul's thought and work alike reached out beyond the limitations of the earthly life of Jesus; and in this he showed far deeper appreciation of the Spirit of Christ and greater loyalty to it than did those who bound themselves more literally to the

habit and words of the Master. But the time came when the danger was no longer that men would hold too closely to the earthly life of Jesus, but rather that they would lose hold of this altogether, and with it would lose the distinctive quality of the new religion. The time came when Paul's way was either too easy or too hard for men; too easy for those who took it to mean that everything that the Christian might think or do was inspired by the Spirit of Christ, and who went on to think and do most un-Christian things in Christ's name; too hard for those who took it to involve a real and clear vision of Christ and a life of actual personal communion with him such as only a few could attain. In such a time the fourth gospel was written to bring Christian faith back to the actuality of the earthly life of Jesus; not, indeed, to rob it of the richness and largeness it had gained through Paul, but to prove that all that Christ had come to be to Christian faith he already really was as a man upon earth, if one would but look below the surface of his life. It was essential, if Christianity was to remain Christian, that it should return to the actual Jesus, and put its feet again upon the solid ground of history. The dangerous heresy then was the denial that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, and the needed testimony was to the reality of things heard, seen with the eyes, and handled concerning the Word of Life. The aim of this writer was not to prove that the man Jesus was divine, against those who declared him to be only a man, but to prove that the divine Christ was truly and fully man, against those who affirmed that his humanity was not real. If we approach the fourth gospel from the reading of the other three, it seems to us that the figure of Jesus is being blended with ideal conceptions, the Logos, light, life, truth, and is in process of being stripped of historical actuality; but if we approach the book from the region of growing Gnosticism, we see that we are being brought back from speculations to realities, and that in effect abstract conceptions are being tested by the living personality of Jesus, and transformed into his likeness.

Now, without pressing a very imperfect analogy, it may perhaps be said that somewhat as the Johannine followed the

Pauline theology, the Ritschlian movement followed and balanced the speculative tendencies of the earlier liberalism. The original contrast of the two schools has not held itself unchanged, but there are at present some liberal theologians, especially of the Ritschlian direction, who urge a return to the historical Jesus as the sufficient and only revelation of God, the ground of faith, and the source of the Christian experience, while other liberals, especially of a more philosophical tendency, affirm that the living Spirit of Christ is the essential element and power of Christianity; that in Paul and the apostolic age we have not a departure from the simple and final gospel of Jesus in a speculative direction, but the emancipation of the Christ-spirit from the trammels of history and the beginning of its normal, free development; and that our present task is not to return to the Jesus of history, but to undertake for our age such a new adjustment and application of the Spirit of Christ as Paul accomplished for his age.

In raising the question which of these two tendencies of modern theology is the truer, we shall do well to approach them in the light of our earlier discussion. From this it resulted that when we seek for a true and living apprehension of Christ, or experience of his divinity, in the gospels, we shall find what we seek, not in the messianic claim or consciousness of Jesus, but in his gospel of the fatherhood of God and the sonship and brotherhood of man; and that when we seek for it in the other books of the New Testament, we shall find it, not in the forms of their Christological beliefs, but in the one experience which sought expression in these various forms, the experience of a new life in Christ, the Spirit. When this has been said, many of the arguments which each side urges against the other's position lose their force.

There are three arguments that are chiefly urged against the more historical by the more philosophical school, and in these the differences between the two tendencies come clearly into view.

1. The Jesus of history cannot be recovered with such certainty that he can be made the source and authority and con-

tents of our religious faith. We can go back from John to the synoptists, but not with certainty from these to their sources; still less from the sources to the traditions out of which they came; and least of all from these traditions to the facts. To this the answer is given: It is true that we cannot recover the details of the deeds and words of Jesus, but this is not what we are seeking for. It is rather the total impression of the person of Jesus, the ruling traits of his character, the fundamental principles of his teaching, his motives and aims, his faiths and ideals; in a word, his spirit; and this Spirit of Jesus can be well known by a study of the gospels, and better known the more critical the study.

2. But, it is said in reply, among the things that historical criticism makes probable about the teachings of Jesus not all are such as reason and conscience can assent to as of permanent validity. On the contrary, some ideas which are most certainly authentic are least capable of being accepted as authoritative. The reference is, of course, especially to the eschatological and apocalyptic region of thought and fancy. The kingdom of God, according to the ruling critical view, was an eschatological conception. The Messiah was one who is coming with the clouds according to Daniel's vision. These eschatological ideas and expectations, proved untrue by events and entirely out of place in the world as we know it, belonged to Jesus because he was a Jew of a certain age; and to him they were not secondary ideas, or merely the form of spiritual truths, but were of primary concern and literal value. We cannot erect the teaching of Jesus into the place of a final and absolute revelation, not only, because we cannot fully recover it, but because not all that we can recover can we approve.

To this two replies are possible. Admitting the eschatological element in the religion of Jesus, it may be urged that it does not constitute the essential contents of his teaching. This is to be found rather in the fatherhood of God and the law of love. The eschatological conceptions of Jesus were, even if not consciously, yet practically in value and in effect, the form of which the other was the substance. The eschatology furnished an

urgent motive, it kindled the fires of men's nature and quickened their higher powers; but the thing itself, the faith and the conduct to which this emotion gave impulse and conquering force was the love of God and the answering and mutual love of men, trust in God and in God's cause for now and forever, and a devotion to it which meant the conquest of self and the world. In this direction, not the other, authority and finality are to be found.

The other reply still further suppresses the eschatological features in the teaching of Jesus, not by interpretation, but by criticism. The eschatological element in the gospels, some declare, is unauthentic, being the first translation of the message and person of Jesus into the language and world-view of current Judaism. This view has been urged, not only by Martineau, who had so strong a bias in its favor, but by so sober and sane a historian as Wellhausen.

3. Over against this it is maintained that there is in any case a permanent objection to the attempt to bind the present to the past. The effort to return to the Jesus of history as the sum and substance of Christianity is an effort to put a past law upon religious thought restraining it, whereas it is the peculiar glory of Christianity, among the religions of the world, that it is a vital force, a principle of development, that it liberates and stimulates thought and will, and does not impose limitations and restraints. Even if it were possible to recover the actual teaching of Jesus, and even if this teaching were found to be altogether of the eternal and absolute quality, with no marks of its age upon it, yet the fact of its being accepted from the past as an external rule and final law would work disastrously, arresting the growth that is essential to health, and limiting that freedom which belongs to the highest life of the spirit. To this the reply is made that it is, of course, possible so to conceive of the finality of Jesus that faith in him shall be a fettering, not a liberating experience; but a literal imitation of his conduct and a literal and legal application of his words is not at all what we mean when we urge a return to the gospels and the earthly life of Jesus. What we seek and find in him is not an outward law for

deed and dogma to which we obediently submit; it is a living person who not only commands but inspires us; it is a personal influence which we invoke to uplift and save us. It is our belief that personality is the only effective force in the sphere of morals and religion, and the supreme person is therefore the supreme and ultimate fact, the only saving and transforming power. Jesus left no code of law, no creed, no dogma. He put no value on an external following of him. Both the limitations of our knowledge of his words and deeds and the nature of that which we do know forbid us from making our return to him a return from liberty to law, from spirit to letter.

Such, in brief, is the conflict between two great tendencies within the ranks of modern liberal theology. Must we now take sides in this great debate, this modern form of an ancient difference among Christian thinkers? May we not fairly say, at least, that the difference is not so deep-going as it seems? It appears to me that, rather than two forms of the Christian religion, we have here two ways, adapted to two types of mind, in which the same thing is attempted, namely, the apprehension of Christ as a reality of present experience. The one who searches in the gospels for the historical Jesus and would make him the foundation of faith, the final revelation of God, really gives this significance, not to what is historically uncertain, nor to what belongs to a past and for us impossible view of the world, but to something historically secure, and unconditioned by time and circumstance—to the personal, inner life, the character, or mind, or spirit of Jesus. It is the eternal that the student of the earthly life of Jesus is searching for, and we surely have no good reason to deny that, in spite of all difficulties, the eager and sympathetic and careful reader of the gospels may come through them into the presence of the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, the one who looks into the apostolic age and into Christian history for the essence and principle of Christianity does not accept past formulas regarding the person and work of Christ as final and binding upon him. He is not looking for a theology, and identifying Christianity with it. He also is looking for the Spirit of Christ; but it seems to him easier to get

through form to reality at the point in history where the earthly life of Jesus has ended, and through death he has become a spiritual power and possession in the lives of his followers. We can best know Christ as spirit, such a one says, by contemplating his work in the spirit. Just that which we want to effect for ourselves, the change from what is past and outward to what is eternal and spiritual, the first believers in the risen Christ achieved. Their experience is typical and of the classic quality. By sinking ourselves in their writings we can enter into the inner reality and truth of their experience in such a way that in us, too, Christ may become an inner, spiritual power. But this end of such a search, the eternal being and spiritual reality of Christ, is precisely what the student of the earthly life of Jesus sets before him; and the question between the two schools resolves itself into this: Can the eternal, divine Spirit of Christ be best found and most surely and purely possessed by investigating and contemplating the man Jesus, of whom the gospels contain memories and impressions; or by observing how, especially in the first age, and there in original and normative fashion, the personality of the historical man of Nazareth became an inspiring, purifying, transforming power in the lives of his followers; and then how, age after age, the Spirit of Christ has proved itself to be the divine spirit of righteousness, holiness, and truth in the lives of men? In other words, shall we regard the earthly life of Jesus as the preliminary stage of a revelation and communication of God which was fully effected only after the end of his earthly life, in the minds of the first believers, and from then till now has been a living, moving, self-evidencing force in human history; or shall we regard the earthly life of Jesus as the pure and full embodiment in man of the divine Spirit, never again so perfectly realized, so that we need always to turn back to that, rather than to look within or about us, for its perfect presence and convincing demonstration?

Different as these two opinions are, and warmly as they are contending for the mastery in the modern mind, I still think we may say that they are only different forms of one faith; not that one is true and the other false, but that one to one mind and the

other to another mind is the truer expression of one reality, the more natural path to one experience. Both hold that the Spirit of Christ is the spirit of God. They agree that in his earthly life the man Jesus was possessed by the spirit of God, lived by it, walked in it. They agree that after his death the power to live by the divine Spirit came to men by faith in his resurrection and lordship, and was experienced as the power to live in him, or to be lived in by him, who is the power of the divine life.

The two ways should not be put into antagonism with each other, and need not be here in America, where the controversy between Ritschlian and liberal schools has not divided modern theology into warring camps. The two ways will, it is true, appeal differently to different minds. There will be some to whom the critical difficulties of the study of the gospels will seem the greater obstacle, and others who are more repelled by the remoteness of the problems of the apostolic age and the strangeness of its views of the world. To some the person and to some the ideal seems the chief reality and force in religion; that is, to some it seems that the great person creates the ideal and makes it effectual; to others, that the ideal inspires the person and is only mirrored and illustrated in him.

Each should follow the way that he finds will lead him nearest to the presence of the Lord. The average man should follow both ways. He should dwell with the man, Jesus of Nazareth, and learn to know God in the man. But he should go back to Paul as well as to Jesus, to the Spirit of Christ in Paul, as well as to the Spirit of Christ in the gospels. The Spirit of Christ was in Paul and others of the early age in its fresh power, and they worked out under a mighty inspiration, before which we stand in awe, the momentous transition by which the Jesus of history was lifted up, away from the earthly realm, into the spiritual and eternal, and was found to be no longer a man of a certain time and race, a certain limited range of activity, a certain view of the world which could not remain unchanged, but a spiritual being, a divine power, working ever new wonders in human life. The call to return to Christ, which we recognize as in a peculiar sense our own, is not the call to undo their work.

John's return to Christ was not in its inner meaning a departure from Paul, nor should ours be. Christianity cannot thrive—one is tempted to say, cannot in the end continue—if it cease to be what it was at the beginning, a religion of the spirit; that is, a present possession and experience of the inner life, a sure and joyful freedom of soul, a motive and principle of individual and social progress. But, on the other hand, the spirit of Christianity must always test itself anew by the mind of Jesus from which it sprang, and must never lose its vital, harmonious relation to him.